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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RANGOON 000753

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: BURMA: POST-NARGIS CONFERENCE GUIDANCE REQUEST

REF: RANGOON 705

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Classified By: P/E Chief Jennifer Harhigh for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) On November 25 in Bangkok, ASEAN will host a "Post-Nargis and Regional Partnership Conference" to solicit an additional USD 103 million to meet ongoing, critical humanitarian needs in the Cyclone Nargis-affected Irrawaddy Delta. In addition to soliciting funds, ASEAN, the UN, and donors intend to use the conference to convey a unified international message to the GOB on the crying needs for humanitarian assistance country wide, the need for donor access to assistance sites, and the usefulness of a Tripartite Core Group (TCG) type mechanism beyond July 2010. These are important messages to deliver in light of growing indications the GOB will clamp down further on donor/NGO expatriate presence in the run up to the 2010 elections. Post requests Department guidance on suggested talking points at the Conference, including on whether we may announce the additional USD 10 million in the pipeline for Nargis recovery efforts (see paragraphs 11-12). End summary.

Continuing Needs Spur Bangkok Conference

¶2. (C) When Senior General Than Shwe made an early November trip to the Delta, he declared the post-Nargis crisis over and gave the GOB full credit for the recovery. Nonetheless, international NGOs and donors agree significant humanitarian needs persist in the Delta and throughout Burma. ASEAN, on behalf of the TCG (composed of the GOB, ASEAN, and the UN), is spearheading a "Post-Nargis and Regional Partnership Conference" to be held in Bangkok November 25 to recognize international efforts to date and to solicit more funding. Although billed as a regional conference to "share experiences" gained from natural disasters in ASEAN countries -- necessary to secure GOB buy in -- the focus of the conference will be entirely on Burma.

¶3. (SBU) According to ASEAN officials in Rangoon, Thai

Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya is scheduled to open the half-day conference. ASEAN Secretary General Surin Pitsuwan, UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) Executive Secretary Noeleen Heyzer, and TCG Chair and GOB Civil Service Head Kyaw Thu will make formal statements, followed by UN, ASEAN, and INGO briefings. Donors will then have the opportunity to make statements or announce pledges supporting the Post-Nargis Prioritized Action Plan.

GOB Reticence

¶4. (C) UN Resident Coordinator Bishow Parajuli observed to diplomats at a November 13 preparatory session that the GOB is "not very keen" on the conference, electing to send Kyaw Thu rather than the Prime Minister or Foreign Minister. Parajuli and others believe the GOB may be trying to save face. With commitments of international donor support still uncertain, the GOB may not want to appear too eager to hold out the hat. Also, the senior general just proclaimed relief efforts a self-help success story. (Note: UN officials in Rangoon are not convinced the conference is a worthwhile endeavor; ASEAN has taken the lead, and the planning process has exposed tensions between the UN and ASEAN offices here. End note.)

End of TCG, Expected Limits on Foreign Presence

¶5. (C) The GOB thus far has insisted that the TCG mandate will expire at the end of July 2010. Already, the GOB has restricted visas for international NGO workers and access to some project sites (Ref A). The GOB also denied a UN request to continue WFP-led helicopter service to the Delta beyond

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last August. The GOB's standing explanation is that the crisis in the Delta has passed; so authorities can revert to the status quo ante for issues like visas and in-country travel authorizations. ASEAN representative Willie Sabandar noted at the November 13 session that the GOB has made it increasingly clear it will allow only "one door" for post-Nargis international assistance: only through July 2010 and not expanding from the Delta. That is a disappointing reduction from donors' original intentions; but ASEAN's position is to "use that door."

¶6. (C) Speculation abounds that the tightening of GOB policy on visas and access is in good part an attempt to limit the number of foreigners in the country ahead of the 2010 elections. Australian Ambassador Chan reports Minister of Social Welfare Major General Maung Maung Swe was quite explicit that, after the TCG mandate expires, it will be very difficult for foreign staff to operate in the Delta due to coming elections.

¶7. (C) The UN's Parajuli said he has informed Secretary 1, Foreign Minister Nyan Win, and other GOB officials that a pre-election clampdown on the donor and NGO presence would have huge negative implications. According to Parajuli, Nyan Win denied the shut-down will happen; but Social Welfare Minister Maung Maung Swe was less definitive, suggesting there is "no need to overreact" and offering assurances that projects can keep running with national staff. Suggesting at least a degree of positive spin from the situation, Parajuli reminded diplomats that international donors did not have large expatriate staffs in Burma prior to Nargis yet they ran their programs; and since expats carry with them high costs there is an advantage in keeping expats to a minimum.

Key Conference Messages

¶8. (C) Parajuli, Sabandar, and diplomats, including Charge, agreed that the tone of the Bangkok conference should be supportive of working to meet continuing post-Nargis needs;

but participants should also stress that the crying need for humanitarian assistance extends beyond the Delta and beyond the 2010 expiration of the TCG's mandate. All agreed the conference presents an opportunity to accent the importance of visas and unfettered access to assistance sites.

Donor Participation/Pledge Commitments

¶9. (SBU) Most donor countries, including Australia, UK, Italy, and France, will be represented at the Bangkok conference at the Ambassadorial level. Germany plans to send a Berlin-based Southeast Asia assistance specialist.

¶10. (SBU) According to Sabandar, ASEAN intends to contribute 20 percent of the USD 103 million requested. Singapore earlier pledged USD 5 million, of which USD 3 million remains available. ASEAN plans to redirect to Nargis USD 5 million of a USD 30 million Japanese contribution to ASEAN. The EU, through the Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund (LIFT), has formalized a contribution of USD 20 million to the Delta over the next year. (Note: The EU initial intent was USD 100 million country-wide over 5 years; however, the GOB insisted on the much more modest beginning.)

Other donors do not appear ready to announce new funds and may focus on prior commitments as contributing to the recovery effort. Observing that few donors seem prepared to "pledge" large new sums, Parajuli suggested and Sabandar agreed not to highlight the Nov. 25 conference as a "pledging session."

Action Request

¶11. (C) Unless Department proposes otherwise, Charge and USAID/RDMA plan to attend the Bangkok conference on behalf of the USG. Post requests clearance on the following draft

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talking points for use at the conference, as well as guidance on whether it is now timely to announce the USD 10 million in additional post-Nargis assistance approved in FY-09.

¶12. (SBU) Begin draft talking points:

-- The U.S. Government is aware of the acute humanitarian needs that continue in the Irrawaddy Delta and other areas of Burma.

-- As other natural disasters in the ASEAN region have shown, recovery is a long-term process that will necessitate years of sustained commitment.

-- We recognize that international NGOs, local NGOs, and UN agencies play a crucial role in that process and require additional funding.

-- We also recognize that for recovery efforts to be successful and sustainable, the Government of Burma must play a vital role. The Government of Burma should increase its own efforts to meet the needs of its people, both in the Delta and elsewhere.

-- The GOB needs also to cooperate with domestic entities and the international community to ensure assistance can be freely delivered, monitored and evaluated. This entails ensuring a mechanism is in place to cut through red tape for issuing visas, allowing access to project sites, and removing other hurdles to the provision of assistance to those in need.

-- The recently announced U.S. policy review reaffirmed the USG interest in expanding humanitarian assistance inside Burma to the extent we are confident the assistance is reaching the people in need.

-- Our experience in providing close to USD 75 million to

Cyclone Nargis relief efforts has proved we can effectively provide assistance directly to the Burmese people.

(Optional: -- We are pleased to announce an additional \$10 million to the post-Nargis recovery effort. This funding will be programmed by USAID in close coordination with INGOs, UN agencies, and other partners. At present we have made no final decisions on how those funds will be used.)

End draft talking points.

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